Commonwealth Small States, Education and Environmental Uncertainty: Learning from the Sharp End

Michael Crossley and Pearlette Louisy

University of Bristol, UK

Saint Lucia

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Abstract

This paper examines the Commonwealth's inclusive role in engaging with the distinctive challenges of education provision in small states, an agenda that is often neglected elsewhere. We examine the origins of Commonwealth work on education in small states, the nature of its comparative advantage, its role in facilitating small states' engagement with international education dialogue and regional co-operation, and the demand and potential for ongoing Commonwealth support for education. Particular attention is given to experience within the Caribbean region and to the potential for the Commonwealth and the wider international community to learn from small states in the light of their distinctive educational challenges, achievements and priorities – and, most notably, their experience at the 'sharp end' of environmental uncertainty and climate change.

Introduction

While the 53 Commonwealth member states have considerable diversity in terms of economic, socio-cultural, environmental and other developmental characteristics, 31 of these are classified as small states (based upon a total population size of 1.5 million people or less) and share many similar characteristics, challenges and potential. At the global level this figure rises to 87 small states (Crossley et al., 2011). The Commonwealth thus has a unique mandate

to engage with the distinctive educational needs of these small states. In view of this, the series of Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) that have been held since their foundation in 1959, have given significant attention to this constituency of the Commonwealth. Indeed, since the 17th CCEM was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2009, dedicated high level sessions have been convened at subsequent CCEMs with a focus upon priorities for education in the small states of the Commonwealth.

In this paper we reflect upon the origins of Commonwealth concerns with education in small states, the Commonwealth's comparative advantage in the light of this, the critical engagement and extent of inclusivity of small states with international dialogue and agendas, the unparalleled challenges of environmental uncertainty, and the potential for the Commonwealth and the wider international development community to learn from the distinctive experience of small states. Today, the latter is especially significant as small island developing states (SIDS) face some of the most urgent and dramatic challenges at what has been called 'the sharp end' of worldwide environmental uncertainty and climate change (Cabot Institute for the Environment, 2014 ; Crossley and Sprague, 2014).

The Commonwealth and Education in Small States

The first major Commonwealth initiative in this arena was the influential Pan-Commonwealth Conference on Education in Small States that was convened in Mauritius during 1985. This meeting did much to stimulate the continuation of such work by the Commonwealth in subsequent years and in generating the foundations for a related international literature. For further insights into this history see Bray and Packer (1993) along with a Commonwealth review by Crossley and Holmes (1999) and the volume *Education in Small States; Policies and Priorities* (Crossley et al., 2011). For present purposes, these publications reveal how

Commonwealth initiatives helped to define the scope and parameters for much early policy analysis and theoretical work conducted on education in small states worldwide.

In practice, this means that, in the field of education, much internationally inspired work that has been carried out is highly concentrated on and in the small states of the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, giving the Commonwealth a unique comparative advantage as an international agency. To some extent, a further concentration on these three regions has been generated by UNESCO's parallel efforts to stimulate and support multidisciplinary work on SIDS (Atchoaréna et al., 2008).

In 1994, for example, the first Global Conference on the sustainable development of SIDS was held in Barbados. This was the first conference on the implementation of Agenda 21 (United Nations, 1992), which was adopted at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, in Rio de Janeiro and applied specifically to small developing states. The 1994 conference ratified the Barbados Programme of Action (BPOA) for the sustainable development of SIDS (United Nations, 1994) and acknowledged 'the special challenges and constraints' that SIDS face related to the current global environmental and development challenges, and proposed actions and policies for environmental and developmental planning (see Crossley and Sprague, 2014). The ensuing Second and Third International Conferences on the Sustainable Development Challenges of Small Island Developing States were held in Mauritius (2004) and Samoa (2014) respectively.

One additional parameter that influenced the nature of much of the early work on education in small states relates to an initial focus upon the problems encountered, and the vulnerabilities and fragilities of small states. This now contested perspective is captured in the title of

Brock's (1984) seminal publication 'Scale, Isolation and Dependence'. Writing from the 1990s from within small states, researchers such as Hau'ofa (1993) in Oceania and Baldacchino (2000) in the Mediterranean were some of the first to point to the limitations and postcolonial implications of the predominance of such deficit perspectives and the related positioning of external agencies. Hau'ofa, thus challenged the nature and use of the concept of 'smallness' as applied in the dominant, economic and aid related international discourse, for 'belittling' indigenous island cultures and communities in the Pacific. In doing so he argues that 'our ancestors, who had lived in the Pacific for over 2000 years, viewed their world as a "sea of islands ", rather than "islands in the sea"' (Hau'ofa, 1993, p.7). This recognises a much 'larger reality', a 'universe of Oceanic mores' and a very different contextually and culturally sensitive postcolonial perspective (Hau'ofa, 1993, p.14), that represents a distinctive and powerful challenge to ongoing dependency in the Pacific. While we support these arguments and their underlying principles, others, including the Commonwealth as an agency, have found ways to retain and advance the small states concept while respecting the critique and moving beyond the deficit discourse. To some extent, these developments and this theoretical repositioning have also influenced renewed interest in 're-reading' the small states literature (Jules and Ressler, 2017), and it is to ways in which this can be further developed, and to the positive lessons that can be learned from this experience, that we now turn.

Critical Engagement with International Dialogue and Agendas

The post 2000 wave of work in and on education in small states has clearly done much to challenge the pervasiveness of the vulnerability parameter and dependency discourse, and has been increasingly well informed by local researchers and a diversity of paradigmatic approaches, including research into the potential of indigenous knowledge and postcolonial

analyses (Smith, 1999; Thaman, 2009; Koya et al., 2010; Fairbairn-Dunlop and Coxon, 2014; Sanga and Reynolds, 2017) and comparative and critical policy studies (Louisy, 2001; Louisy, 2004; Mayo, 2008). In 2012 a Special Issue of the on-line journal *Current Issues in Comparative Education (CICE),* for example, focussed international attention on the 'Fragilities, Vulnerabilities and Strengths' of education in small states, arguing that: ' …the raison d'etre of small states research is more pertinent now than ever … and continues the resurgent discourse about what we can learn from them' (Jules, 2012, p.5).

Other recent work that testifies to the international impact of a contemporary phase of renewed attention includes research commissioned and published for the 2009 UNESCO/IIEP Education Policy Forum on Tertiary Education in Small States (Martin and Bray, 2011); the development of the Commonwealth of Learning's Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) (Commonwealth of Learning n.d.); ongoing UNESCO led initiatives with SIDS worldwide; and the launch of new academic journals such as *Small States and Territories* as recently as 2017.

At the same time, increased recognition has been given to the differences between small states and the importance of research and development work that takes such differences into account while acknowledging the pertinence of some shared concerns and experience (Petzold and Ratter, 2019). In the light of this, we argue that while Commonwealth small states may have some distinctive educational and environmental challenges and experience from which others can learn, this is a complex and subtle learning process and we do not advocate uncritical policy transfer - be it between small states, to the Commonwealth itself or to the wider international education community.

Our own research is thus marked by clear recognition that, in the pre-2015 era, most small states were ahead of many education systems in terms of progress towards Education for All (EFA) targets and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). At the basic education level, for example, many small states have long achieved access for all, and were leaders in pushing the boundaries of global discourse in favour of initiatives designed to prioritise quality, inclusion and equity in education. Moreover, they were also some of the first to challenge global discourse on basic education and to re-prioritise tertiary education and training. This recognised that tertiary provision is especially crucial for small nations that need to develop all of their scarce human resources to the highest level for active participation in the modern, global knowledge economy. To cite Crossley, Bray and Packer (2011, p.56) small states have:

> *… been among the first to extend the concept and boundaries of basic education to prioritise secondary and higher education and, in tune with early EFA agendas, to reprioritise adult and lifelong learning. They have done much to pioneer efforts to move beyond what have long been the dominant global goals and targets, and to prioritise skills training for the modern economy, strategies to deal with the migration of teachers and other professionals, the expansion and strengthening of higher education and the use of ICT.*

On a broader level our research has also highlighted the emergence of widespread concern with the implications of global economic and environmental uncertainties - most notably the impact of climate change and sea level rise - for education and education for sustainable development (ESD) within and beyond small states (Crossley and Sprague, 2014; Louisy, 2014). Climate change and environmental uncertainty are, for example, identified as dominant concerns currently faced by SIDS, and have some of the most pressing implications for

education and training in such contexts (Heibert, 2012). We will return to this and to some of these key issues in more detail later, with particular reference to experience within the Caribbean region.

Having said this, there is much evidence to suggest that throughout the EFA and MDG eras the distinctive educational priorities held, and clearly articulated, by small states were largely overlooked and marginalised at the international level (Bacchus, 2008; Mayo, 2008). With the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it can be argued that this broader range of international targets is both more global in coverage and better reflects the priorities and concerns of many small states. However, it remains to be seen if this more globally inclusive spirit and cross sectoral scope will be implemented in context sensitive ways that are compatible with the aspirations, priorities and values held within Commonwealth small states. In this new interconnected context, there may be potential for greater inclusivity at the international level, but power imbalances in the architecture of many international agencies, and the increasing influence of less flexible SDG measurement indicators, raise renewed concerns about the implementation of internationally 'agreed' educational agendas in practice (King, 2017). Potentially, this could lead development on the ground to run counter to core SDG (and Commonwealth) aspirations for the forms of quality education that promote diverse human and cultural values, critical awareness, social justice, and skills for peaceful sustainable development.

To this critique should be added greater awareness of the increasingly powerful international influence on education policy of metrics, the big data movement and the impact of the OECD's PISA studies and related educational league tables. These may have much to offer

but they have also done much to foster the over-simplistic global transfer of perceived ‘best practice’ and an international culture of accountability and high stakes testing (Crossley, 2014). This, as writers such as Sellar and Lingard (2013) and Forestier and Crossley (2015) argue, is often inspired by policy and practice in the high performing and highly formalistic education systems of South Korea, Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong. In the Pacific island state of Fiji, for example, there is recent evidence of tensions between local professional and practitioner commitment to Pacific cultural values and learner centred pedagogy, and emergent Ministry of Education reforms favouring a commitment to high stakes testing and a formalistic professional culture influenced by PISA results and the three regional reference societies of Australia, New Zealand and India (Crossley et al., 2017). Here there is new and locally contested evidence of the continued dominance of ‘one size fits all’ international agendas and priorities on the policy trajectories of Commonwealth small states in the Pacific region.

In the light of this, there is considerable potential for the Commonwealth to do more to support Pacific and other small states in improving the quality of education and in engaging with pertinent international developments. But, if this is to be done in line with established Commonwealth democratic principles, it will require greater critical and reflective analysis, genuinely collaborative work, and mediation initiatives that are appropriately sensitive to cultural and contextual differences and values. This is, as argued above, is a subtle process, and one that requires much more than improved test results, success in competitive international league tables and the advocacy of dominant international forms of ‘best practice’ for all (Crossley, 2019). To echo Hau’ofa (1993), Oceania must continue to assert its cultural identity, and as Caribbean writers, including Louisy (2011, p.xv), argue :

> *While [small states] must continue to seek external assistance to implement their development strategies, they know best what their own needs are and what their priorities should be. They have much to contribute to the international discourse and to policy deliberations worldwide.*

It is to the implications of this for future Commonwealth work with and for small states that we now turn. This is done with reference to illustrative examples from Saint Lucia and the Caribbean region that relate to tertiary education in small states and the impact of climate change and environmental uncertainty. In concluding, we will return to the potential for the Commonwealth and the international educational development community to learn from the experience of small states at 'the sharp end' of environmental uncertainty.

Implications for Ongoing Commonwealth Cooperation.

As can be seen from the discussion above, the international and regional contexts for small states have changed dramatically since the first Commonwealth Education Conference was held in Oxford in 1959. New independent states have emerged and political balances of power have shifted markedly throughout the decolonisation process and under the influence of the intensification of globalisation. Indeed, rising global powers such as China, India and Brazil are now influencing domestic policies in many small states and throughout the Global South, and affecting power structures and aid relationships with and between traditional development partners (Kragelund, 2019). This has deep implications for all Commonwealth agencies, initiatives and processes as they continue to seek appropriate ways to support member states, be they large or small, rich or poor. In recent years, increasing resource constraints, neo-liberal reforms and related structural changes have also had an impact upon the level and nature of Commonwealth cooperation and support in the field of education. These

developments, we argue, are especially pertinent for small states that have long welcomed collaborative initiatives and Commonwealth partnerships (Williams and Urwick, 2012) to help overcome challenges related to their limited human resource base.

The two issues that we have selected for more detailed consideration in the next sections reveal how the distinctive educational challenges faced by small states often require similarly distinctive policy responses, and how ongoing Commonwealth co-operation and support can continue to play a strategic and timely contribution.

Tertiary Education Policy and Practice

From the outset, tertiary education development in the small states of the Commonwealth Caribbean looked outwards to western metropolitan countries for models, inspiration and guidance. Indeed, until relatively recent times the international community discouraged the development of home grown tertiary education provision within Commonwealth small states. It was argued that it would be more cost-effective for students to attend universities and courses abroad, or in the two premier regional universities that were established as decolonisation progressed in the Caribbean (The University of the West Indies) and the Pacific (The University of the South Pacific) regions.

Former colonial powers and perspectives thus had a dominant influence upon early tertiary education policy and practice in the Caribbean. The University College of the West Indies, now the University of the West Indies (UWI), for example, was established in 1948 under the leadership of the then Vice Chancellor of St. Andrews University in Scotland as ’a university for the multi-racial international community of the Commonwealth Caribbean and a prototype of the university for the twenty-first century where knowledge and learning know no frontiers

and accept no horizons' (Fraser et al., 1998, p.64). Already one can detect the subtle undertones of the type of tertiary education policy and practice which would be the hallmark of this regional institution: policies and practices which have now become the gold standard for tertiary education worldwide. These include the internationalisation of education, cultural diversity, collaboration, the democratisation of education, education without borders and the virtual university. The drive for the expansion of tertiary education opportunities would subsequently result in the decentralisation of the University into three island campuses (Jamaica in 1948, Trinidad and Tobago in 1960, Barbados in 1963), and an Open Campus from 2008 now offering both online and on-site access.

With the attainment of political independence by individual island states and the need to accelerate the development of their human resources to meet their economic needs, this exclusive regional approach also began to be challenged, largely by local voices, in both the Caribbean and the Pacific, and complemented by the in-country provision of tertiary education. Crocombe and Meleisea (1989) and Crocombe and Crocombe (1994) reflect upon the nature of such developments in the Pacific, and similar trends can be seen in the Caribbean that resulted in the establishment of State or Community Colleges especially in the UWI's non-campus countries. Thus were born the national tertiary institutions of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). These were fashioned as multi-purpose, multi-level, multi-mode institutions offering a range of general, technical and professional programmes, and bolstered by strong inter-institutional partnerships with regional and international institutions (Louisy, 1993). This new development in the tertiary education sector, although seen by some as a weakening of the regional ideal, set the stage for the development of an integrated regional system. Indeed, tertiary education planners and policy makers had been advocating the need to see the sector 'in the round'. The tertiary education

policy and practice that has therefore emerged in the Commonwealth Caribbean has encompassed processes of centralisation and decentralisation, alongside harmonisation and diversification. This has led, on the one hand, to the strengthening of national institutions, and on the other to the consolidation of regional provision based on networks of mutually-supporting institutions, including the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions (ACTI) and the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) which focuses on resilience building in the economic and technological spheres.

The Caribbean has also opened its system to private providers as a strategy to widen access while trying to mitigate the heavy expenditures from public budgets involved in the development of public tertiary education (Martin, 2011). What is not certain is the level of their commitment to a regional system of tertiary education in which independent, mutually-supporting institutions operating at different levels are articulated with each other. Ensuring this level of regional commitment, therefore, remains a tertiary level educational priority within the Commonwealth Caribbean.

On the positive side, while it is two decades since a call was made for the UWI to consider positioning itself as a ’topping -up’ and graduate institution at the apex of a network of associated undergraduate colleges , a new initiative – a Colleges of the West Indies (CUWI) system - intended to deepen links by connecting the UWI to all interested and qualified Community Colleges in the region is now being proposed. This new initiative, described as a vital step towards a more resilient, high-quality regional tertiary education system, has had a promising start with a number of Colleges in Jamaica indicating their intent to become Colleges of the University of the West Indies. The fledging institution which, seventy one years ago began life as a College of a metropolitan University now has Colleges of its own

and is currently celebrating its ranking among the top five percent of best universities in the world (The Times Higher Education, 2019). In a new take on Rex Nettleford's (1988) strategy for 'inward stretch, outward reach', UWI is also continuing to strengthen its global presence by looking beyond the Commonwealth and other traditional partners and leveraging its reputational excellence to expand its global footprint. As the premier tertiary education provider in the Caribbean the UWI has thus declared itself ready to take on the leadership role in positioning the small states of the region to take advantage of the wider opportunities that exist in the global environment and to contribute to development efforts in the international arena. Its current Vice Chancellor, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, enunciates the mission which should inform the region's tertiary education policy and practice.

> *We must go into the wider world with one voice and one identity, as a unified intellectual force to serve Caribbean peoples and the wider world; we must be one University with an activist agenda seeking alignment between industry and academia for wealth creation and distribution; expansion of access to tertiary education and increased agility to global opportunities* (Beckles, 2019).

Beckles also argues that there is a missing link in the form of research and innovation. Here then is a further opportunity for the Commonwealth to both recognise the emergence of new and potential international partners in this region, and build upon its own comparative advantage to maintain its place and role in Caribbean tertiary education. It has, for example, a proven track record of strengthening research capacity in the region through initiatives like the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation. More specifically, one vital area where Caribbean and Commonwealth experience has much to offer the wider international community relates to the

educational implications of climate change and environmental uncertainty. It is to this key issue that we now turn.

Climate Change, Environmental Uncertainty and Education

In the aftermath of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, David Lee (2016), an Environment Specialist with the Caribbean Leadership Project, in a blog entitled 'Impending Doom?' recalled the late Dr. Martin Luther King's warning that :

> *We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.*

Lee (2016) also asked whether the Caribbean and indeed the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) were up to the task of ensuring that the many commitments made by the Parties to the Paris Agreement would be delivered within the agreed time frame. Recognising that the region is on the frontline of climate change issues, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was ready for Paris (Jessop, 2015). A task force had been set up two years before the convening of the Conference of Parties (COP 21) to prepare its position and to submit to the international community its list of critical issues under the simple but poignant mantra - '1.5 to Stay Alive'. The Caribbean Delegation succeeded in mobilising third-party support among the huge number of Non-Governmental Organisations, business interests, environmentalists and others present in Paris to get the Agreement adopted. The islands of the Caribbean have thus demonstrated that small states can contribute meaningfully to dialogue, debates and discussion on even the most intractable issues at the international level.

The Caribbean influence at the COP 21 was not an isolated initiative. Located as it is along a subduction zone within the Atlantic Hurricane Belt, the Caribbean Archipelago is highly vulnerable to cyclonic, seismic and associated natural hazards and has been described as one of the highest risk areas of the planet. Consequently, the region has, over the years, had to pioneer the development of strategies and mechanisms to mitigate or adapt to the effects of increasing climate variability, extreme weather conditions and a rise in sea level. In 2005 the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) was established to coordinate the region's response to climate change. In 2007 the Caribbean Catastrophic Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) - considered to be the world's first regional fund using parametric insurance - was also introduced to reduce the economic impact of natural catastrophes by quickly providing short-term liquidity when a policy is triggered. This initiative was followed in 2009 by the establishment of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) which deals with all aspects of disaster management for participating states.

These innovative, home-grown initiatives underscore the region's growing realisation that its small states are facing many of the extremes of environmental uncertainty. This, and the educational implications of such challenges, were brought to the fore in 2014 at an inter-disciplinary conference organised by the Education in Small States Research Group and the Cabot Institute for the Environment at the University of Bristol, UK. It was at this event that SIDS were conceptualised as being at 'the sharp end' of environmental uncertainty … having much valuable experience from which the international community could learn relating to climate change resilience and education for sustainable development (ESD). Full details, video reports and related publications can be found on the Cabot Institute (2014) website (see also www.smallstates.net; Louisy, 2014; CHEC Points, 2014).

From this and other related literature there is much to suggest that mainstreaming Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into education planning and delivery has an important role to play in building the capacity of all stakeholders to mitigate or adapt to environmental change (Heibert, 2012). In the Pacific much locally initiated work is being carried out in developing ESD materials and in building related teaching activity into university and school level programmes (see, for example, Koya et al., 2010). However, at the broader policy level, there has been a lukewarm response in the Caribbean where there is little evidence of regional policies for ESD being sustained in practice (Louisy, 2015). There is, for example, no specific focus on this approach in the 2011 – 2021 Education Strategy formulated by the OECS (2016), nor in the latest Five-Year Sector Plan of the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development in Saint Lucia.

It is, nevertheless, becoming evident that education for sustainability is increasingly being interpreted by many as education for resilience, and that building resilience is an important element of small states' efforts to withstand policy-induced vulnerabilities. Indeed, the theme for the 20th CCEM held during 2018 in Fiji, 'Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?' could not have been more appropriate or timely. As a lead participant in this CCEM, the University of the West Indies was in a favoured position to speak to this core issue, particularly at the special session for small states on universities, climate change and resilience (Republic of Fiji, 2018).

Many recommendations that stem from the three most recent CCEMs (Mauritius in 2012, The Bahamas in 2015, Fiji in 2018) thus reflect the distinctive aspirations and educational priorities of small states and point to ways forward that include: the development of

curriculum materials which could raise awareness of living with smallness of size and its inherent economic, social, cultural and environmental strengths and vulnerabilities; protocols to reduce the outward migration of skilled personnel to larger and richer neighbour states (Penson and Yonemura, 2012); and the promotion of skills and competencies in the management and mobilisation of resources to deal with both endogenous and exogenous shocks to improve the country's resilience index.

Educational, environmental and policy-oriented materials and activities that may be developed in the light of this could, with Commonwealth support, be used to great effect across a range of small states, thus fostering important and strategic SIDS-SIDS learning and collaboration. Moreover, it is this type of durable and genuine partnership which the Third UN Conference on Small Island Developing States 'SAMOA Pathway' (United Nations, 2019) called for when it spoke of enhanced international collaboration, including North-South, South-South and SIDS-SIDS cooperation.

Conclusions

Living at the sharp end of environmental uncertainty is a fact of life for small states worldwide. This is especially true for SIDS such as the Maldives in the Indian Ocean and Tuvalu in the Pacific that face national inundation with as little as a one meter rise in sea level. Challenged on many fronts, they have learnt to look for realistic responses both from within and from without in order to maintain their viability. Many have also understood the value of inter-connectedness as well as the importance of adjusting generic policy models, strategies and assumptions to local contextual and cultural differences. The Caribbean Community has, for example, long acknowledged the good sense of working together. The principles of functional cooperation, integration and harmonisation are overarching themes

that underpin regionalism as an ideal, as a resource and an inclusive style of operating (Carrington, 1993).

Given this distinctive experience there is much that the Commonwealth itself and the wider international community can learn *from* small states; and, it is argued here, that there is much that the Commonwealth can do to avoid simplistic policy transfer while facilitating mutual learning and ongoing educational cooperation between and beyond small state regions.

Times have changed since Commonwealth Ministers of Education first met in Oxford 60 years ago. The international architecture of education and development is increasingly complex exhibiting changes in the balance of power, indicating disruptions to traditional international relationships and suggesting the need for new, innovative and 'decolonised' modes of operation.

Within this changing global environment the Commonwealth is positioned well to do more to recognise the significance of cultural and contextual differences in education and international development; to acknowledge and engage with the postcolonial challenges and implications raised by and within their member states; and to maintain and enhance genuine educational partnerships in ways that recognise the limitations of policy imposition and the uncritical international transfer of dominant models and questionable 'best practice' - strategies that remain prevalent modes of agency operation elsewhere. If the resources that are needed to provide such support and cooperation are maintained, the Commonwealth could continue to make an important and strategic contribution to education across all member states, be they large or small, but this is especially so for those small island developing states at the sharp end of the most pressing environmental challenges worldwide.

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Biographical Details

Michael Crossley, FRSA, FAcSS, is Emeritus Professor of Comparative and International Education and Director of the Education in Small States Research Group (www.smallstates.net), University of Bristol, School of Education, UK. He is the immediate past President of the British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE) and a former Associate Dean for Planning and Research at the University of Papua New Guinea. He is currently Adjunct Professor of Education at The University of the South Pacific. Key research interests relate to theoretical and methodological scholarship on the future of comparative and international education; the international transfer of educational policy and practice; educational research and evaluation capacity and international development cooperation; and educational development in small states. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and Fellow of the UK Academy for the Social Sciences.

Pearlette Louisy, GCSL, GCMG, is Governor General Emerita of Saint Lucia. She is a former Dean, Vice Principal and Principal of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College in Saint Lucia and former Secretary of the Association of Caribbean Tertiary Institutions. She was a doctoral student and a founding member of The Education in Small States Research Group, University of Bristol, School of Education, U.K. and is the recipient of honorary doctoral degrees (Doctor of Laws) from the Universities of Bristol, Sheffield and The West Indies. Her key research interests relate to the management and provision of tertiary education in small states, particularly the small states of the Caribbean; the relationship between culture and development, culture and education and culture and language; and the environmental challenges facing small island states and their responses to these challenges. She is an Honorary Distinguished Fellow of the University of the West Indies and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.